

George Washington Papers, Series 2, Letterbooks 1754-1799

To THE MAYOR, CORPORATION, AND CITIZENS OF ALEXANDRIA

[Alexandria, April 16, 1789.]

Gentlemen: Although I ought not to conceal, yet I cannot describe, the painful emotions which I felt in being called upon to determine whether I would accept or refuse the Presidency of the United States.

The unanimity of the choice, the opinion of my friends, communicated from different parts of Europe, as well as of America, the apparent wish of those, who were not altogether satisfied with the Constitution in its present form, and an ardent desire on my own part, to be instrumental in conciliating the good will of my countrymen towards each other have induced an acceptance.

Those, who have known me best (and you, my fellow citizens, are from your situation, in that number) know better than any others that my love of retirement is so great, that no earthly consideration, short of a conviction of duty, could have prevailed upon me to depart from my resolution, “ *never more to take any share in transactions of a public nature .*” For, at my age, and in my circumstances, what possible advantages could I propose to myself, from embarking again on the tempestuous and uncertain ocean of public-life?

I do not feel myself under the necessity of making public declarations, in order to convince you, Gentlemen, of my attachment to yourselves, and regard for your interests. The whole tenor of my life has been open to your inspection; and my past actions, rather than my present declarations, must be the pledge of my future conduct.

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In the mean time I thank you most sincerely for the expressions of kindness contained in your valedictory address. It is true, just after having bade adieu to my domestic connexions, this tender proof of your friendship is but too well calculated still farther to awaken my sensibility, and encrease my regret at parting from the enjoyments of private life.

All that now remains for me is to commit myself and you to the protection of that beneficent Being, who, on a former occasion has happily brought us together, after a long and distressing separation. Perhaps the same gracious Providence will again indulge us with the same heartfelt felicity. But words, my fellow-citizens, fail me: *Unutterable sensations must then be left to more expressive silence: while, from an aching heart, I bid you all, my affectionate friends and kind neighbours, farewell!* 40

40. In the writing of William Jackson. From the "Letter Book" copy in the *Washington Papers*.

The addresses to Washington, and his answers thereto, are entered in a distinct series of three volumes of the "Letter Book." In most cases the addresses to Washington are entered in full, along with his answers.

Washington arrived at the Fountain Inn in Baltimore on the afternoon of April 17. The address of the citizens was delivered to him, and answered about 6 o'clock p.m. He left Baltimore about 5 a. m., April 18, and reached Wilmington, Del., April 19, where he received and answered an address from the burgesses and common council of the borough, and also one from the Delaware Society for Promoting Domestic Manufactures. Both these addresses and answers are in the "Letter Book" in the *Washington Papers*.

***To THE CITIZENS OF BALTIMORE**

[April 17, 1789.]

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Gentlemen: The tokens of regard and affection, which I have often received from the Citizens of this Town, were always acceptable; because, I believed them, always sincere. Be pleased to receive my best acknowledgments for the renewal of them, on the present occasion.

If the affectionate partiality of my fellow Citizens has prompted them to ascribe to greater effects to my conduct and character, than were justly due; I trust, the indulgent sentiment on their part, will not produce an overweening presumption on mine.

I cannot now, Gentlemen, resist my feelings so much, as to withhold the communication of my ideas, respecting the actual situation and prospect of our national affairs. It appears to me, that little more than common sense and common honesty, in the transactions of the community at large, would be necessary to make us a great and a happy Nation. For if the general Government, lately adopted, shall be arranged and administered in such a manner as to acquire the full confidence of the American People, I sincerely believe, they will have greater advantages, from their Natural, moral and political circumstances, for public felicity, than any other People ever possessed.

In the contemplation of those advantages, now soon to be realized, I have reconciled myself to the sacrifice of my fondest wishes, so far as to enter again upon the stage of Public life. I know the delicate nature of the duties incident to the part which I am called to perform; and I feel my incompetence, without the singular assistance of Providence to discharge them in a satisfactory manner. But having undertaken the task, from a sense of duty, no fear of encountering difficulties and no dread of losing popularity, shall ever deter me from pursuing what I conceive to be the true interests of my Country.

[MD.H.S.]

***To THE LADIES OF TRENTON WHO ASSEMBLED AT THE TRIUMPHAL ARCH46**

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Trenton, April 21, 1789.

General Washington cannot leave this place without expressing his acknowledgments, to the Matrons and Young Ladies who received him in so Novel and grateful a manner at the Triumphal Arch in Trenton, for the exquisite sensation he experienced in that affecting moment. The astonishing contrast between his former and actual situation at the same spot, the elegant taste with which it was adorned for the present occasion, and the innocent appearance of the *white-robed Choir* who met him with the gratulatory song,⁴⁷ have made such impressions on his remembrance, as, he assures them, will never be effaced.⁴⁸

46. Part of the inscription reads: "Erected by them on the Bridge, which extends across the Creek." An unknown hand has inserted the word "Assanpink" before the word "Creek."

47. Washington has entered on pp. 17–18 of this volume of the "Letter Book" the words of the song which was sung by the "*white robed Choir*," and also a copy of his acknowledgment to the ladies, which is the only entry in the volume in his writing.

48. From the original in the Trenton Public Library. For a photostat of this, and Jane Ewing's description, I am indebted to Dr. Carlos E. Godfrey, director of New Jersey Public Record Office.

"The Triumphal Arch supported by thirteen Pillars adorned with wreaths of flowers the form was thus [a rough diagram of arch and pillars, entwined with flowers. The inscription on the arch reads: 'The Protector of the Mothers will also protect their Daughters,' Below the center of the arch was hung a small square on which was the date December 26, 1776] the writing large letters painted yellow on white; the pillars on one side 6 the other 7 observe all the Scollops is wreaths of laurel and pillars flowers. the Ladies was rang'd in a line from the arch along the Bridge and thirteen Girls dress't in white with Baskets of flowers they sung the inclos'd song and when they come these words Build and strew thy

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way with flowers they skaterd them round that is the flowers out of their Baskets round his horses feet. he sat on his horse while they sung and then made them a low Bow say'd the Ladies had done them a very great honour requested them to except his most greateful thanks, the most respectable Carecters met him at the ferry, the Infantry and Dragoons they made a grand apearance he stayd all night at Vandigrifts Mr. Ewing and a few others spent the Evening with him and next morning at Sunrise accompanied him 8 miles out of town."— *Jane Ewing to James Hunter, jr.*, at Philadelphia, Apr. 23, 1789. The original is in the Public Record Office at Trenton, N. J.

Marshall's account gives the inscription as: "The Defender of the Mothers will be the Protector of the Daughters," and says the dates of the two memorable events were on a dome or cupola of flowers and evergreens above the arch. Sparks, quoting from Marshall, v. 12, p. 149–50, gives the verses sung by the young ladies. Joseph Vandegrift's tavern was on North Warren Street. Jane Ewing was the wife of Maskell Ewing, and daughter of James Hunter, of Philadelphia.

Washington reached Princeton April 21, where he received and answered an address from the president and faculty of the College of New Jersey and the inhabitants. He reached New Brunswick April 22, and lodged at Woodbridge; and arrived at Bridgetown April 23. A specially built barge, rowed by 13 pilots, with Capt. Thomas Randall acting as coxswain, conveyed him across New York bay to the city, which he reached about 2 o'clock p.m. This barge was afterwards presented to the President. (The letter from a number of gentlemen of New York City to Captain Randall, Apr. 20, 1789, is in the *Washington Papers*.)